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Armstrong State College
Savannah, Georgia

A Biography of James Wallace McAlpin

Brett M. Campbell
Historical Methods 450
Dr. Warlick
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ABSTRACT

James Wallace McAlpin was born October 29, 1831, son of Henry McAlpin a wealthy businessman. Mr. McAlpin was one of eight children. He was educated as a civil engineer, and worked on the construction of the South-Western Railroad between Albany and Macon. Mr. McAlpin served in the Confederate Army for the entire war. He became a wealthy planter on the Savannah River with his wife, Maria S. Champion. Mr. McAlpin and his wife had five children together. Mr. McAlpin died August 3, 1905, outliving his wife, Maria, and leaving a large estate behind.



JAMES W. McALPIN

McALPIN

The name McAlpin is a prominent name in the history of Savannah from around 1815 to the present day. However, the name has a history which dates back all the way to the time of Kenneth McAlpin of Scotland. The name McAlpin originated from the name Alpin which consists of several clans. The Alpin clan was separated by great distances in the Scottish highlands. The Alpin clan consisted of the Gregors, the Grants, the Mackinnons, Macquarries, Macnabs, and MacAulays. All of these clans claimed to be the oldest and noblest of the highland clans.¹

The war cry of the Alpin clan is as follows in Gaelic "Cuimhnich bas Ailpein" which in its English translation means "Remember the death of Alpin" referring to King Alpin.² The badge of the clans is the Giuthas (pine tree). The motto of the clan is "E'en do baite spare not". The colors of the tartan are green, blue, and yellow.³ The coat of arms consists of a face with a crown, below which is another crown, below the second crown is a hand holding a broad sword, and to the right of this is a pine tree with a lion under it . The colors of the coat of arms are the same as the tartan.⁴

Introduction

James Wallace McAlpin was born to Henry and Ellen McInnis McAlpin of October 29, 1831.⁵ James was one of eight children born to the McAlpins. Henry McAlpin, an immigrant from Sterlinshire, Scotland. He married Ellen, the only daughter of Joseph and Dorothy Mary McInnis, in Charleston on May 28, 1819. Of their eight children only seven of them lived to become mature adults. James had four brothers and three sisters of which his sister, Catherine, died at the age of two.⁶ Mrs. McAlpin did not live long enough to see her children grow up, because she died at the young age of 31 years, 9 months. Henry McAlpin then made arrangements with his first wife's mother to take care of the boys at the Hermitage Plantaion and sent his daughters to live with relatives in Charleston. Mrs. Melrose, Henry's mother-in-law, was loved by the children and proof of this can be found on her tombstone in Laurel Grove Cemetery.⁷

Mr. McAlpin's schooling is somewhat of a mystery due to the lack of school records existing from that time period. However, it can be speculated that he and his brothers either attended Chatham Free Academy, a school for the more privileged, or one of the several private school located in the city at that time.⁸ Mr. McAlpin then went on to expand his knowledge past the early schooling at either an unknown college or as an apprentice to a civil engineer.

The early years of Mr. McAlpin's professional career were spent working on the construction of the South-Western Railroad, a subsidiary of the Central of Georgia Railroad. This was to be a rail line connecting Macon with Albany.⁹ In 1851, the first 51 miles of the railroad were completed as far as the Flint River in Oglethorpe, Georgia. Two years later 21 miles of track extending westward were finished ending up in Butler, Georgia. This track met with another line known as the Muscogee Railroad which had been started in Columbus in 1847. Between 1856-57 the Georgia & Florida RY was constructed from Americus southward to Albany some 35 and a half miles, and was then turned over to the South-Western RR. This completed the intended line from Macon to Albany.¹⁰ The actual job of Mr. McAlpin is not exactly known; however, one could surmise that he was an engineer.

During the last years of the construction of the railroad, Mr. McAlpin married Maria Sophia Champion. Miss Champion was the only daughter of Aaron and Mary Jane Griggs Champion. Aaron Champion had been a long time friend of the McAlpin family. James and Maria were married at the Christ Church on the evening of December 4, 1856. They were married by the Right Reverend Stephen Elliot.¹¹

The hostilities between the North and the South at this time led Mr. McAlpin to enlist in the Confederate Cavalry.¹² In January of 1861 he dismounted at Fort Pulaski serving there until June of that same year. In June he served a thirty day tour with the Georgia Hussars in the defense of Skidaway Island,

as a Second Sergeant. In June of 1862, he enlisted in the Chatham Artillery as a private, and later gained the rank of corporal. After reaching the rank of corporal, he was then promoted to the rank of Captain of Company "D" Second Regiment of Confederate Engineers. During this time he was also acting engineer in the "District of Savannah".¹³ He was in the service of the Confederate Army for the duration of the war, being sent to act as staff officer for any of numerous generals.¹⁴ During the war he resided in Savannah most of the time. The McAlpin House which now stands on 230 Barnard Street was supposedly selected by Sherman for his headquarters during his time in Savannah. This is the house which was designed and built by Henry McAlpin for Aaron Champion and was later given to Maria and her children. According to one of Mr. McAlpin's relatives he reminded Sherman of a favor he had done for him in the past, and Sherman remembering this favor moved on to the headquarters we know today.¹⁵

Children

James and Maria had a large family together which consisted of three boys and two girls. All of the McAlpin children were born in Savannah. The oldest of the children was Aaron Champion McAlpin, born December 30, 1857, and was named after his mother's father, Aaron Champion. Aaron married Mary Davis Footman, of Savannah on April 25, 1883. Aaron and Mary had three children: Anna Davis, born February 3, 1884; Maria

Champion, born December 24, 1886; Aaron Champion, born February 16, 1890. The second oldest child was Henry McAlpin, born August 4, 1860, and was named after his father's father. Henry married Claudia Thomas, of Athens on November 18, 1885. Henry and Claudia had one child, Claudia Thomas, born July 6, 1887. The third oldest child was Mary Ellen McAlpin, born February 28, 1863. Mary Ellen married Lieutenant Freeman Valentine Walker, U.S.A. on April 12, 1882, at Seclusival, the family estate near Augusta. The fourth oldest child was James Wallace McAlpin, Jr., born April 24, 1865. James married Catherine Bostick of Garnett, South Carolina. The youngest of the McAlpin children was Maria Sophia McAlpin, born January 31, 1869, and was named after her mother. Maria Sophia married William Henry Walker Schley. Maria Sophia and William had two children: Maria Champion Schley and Mary Townsend Schley.¹⁶

Business Affairs

Mr. McAlpin was a shrewd businessman like both his father and his father-in-law. Like both of them he was out to provide for his family so that they could live well. His business career started in 1854 when he and his brothers started A. McAlpin & Brothers in which they carried on the work of their father. Angus, with his wife and children and probably Donald, his brother, lived on the plantation. Everything was running fine until the outbreak of war when the three brothers enlisted in the Confederate Army. During this time the Hermitage was left

in the hands of Angus' wife. When skirmishes between the two armies drew too near the family fled from the plantation. The jewels of the family were buried under the trees around the plantation and the rest was left in the house. When the family returned they found the house and the treasures of the house plundered by Sherman's army. During the war the brothers lost the plantation to Aaron Champion. In 1857 the brothers had mortgaged the estate for \$19,007.09 and then in 1861 with the first mortgage still unpaid they borrowed another \$56,035.50 using the estate and some of the slaves as security. With the war so close the plantation was hurt economically, and if that wasn't bad enough the reconstruction period really made it impossible for them to pay back the notes. In 1866 Aaron Champion was forced to foreclose on the plantation. Mr. Champion then gave the plantation to his daughter and her children, and made James Wallace the trustee of the property.¹⁷ This, however, did not hold back James Wallace; he constructed several large lighters which were used to transport cotton from Augusta to Savannah.¹⁸ By transporting cotton up and down the Savannah River he was able to replace a great deal of his wealth. Once his wealth was recovered he began buying property around town. James acquired several pieces of property at the end of Jones Street which was known as Montmollinville.¹⁹ He owned fourteen lots of property in this area of town, and from information acquired from the deeds and a map from 1856 one could assume that this property is the Swoll Ward.²⁰ However, the deeds for this ward do not contain his name, which would confirm this

assumption. Mr. McAlpin also owned property in the Pulaski Ward and Waynes Wharf, located west of West Broad Street off of Canal Street. Much of the property that he was in charge of had the same conditions on them as the Hermitage; that is, he was the trustee for his wife and children. This was the case for the house on 230 Barnard Street which was designed by Henry McAlpin for Aaron Champion, who in turn gave it to his daughter with these same provisions.²¹ James Wallace McAlpin had several professions throughout his life all of which he enjoyed, but all in all he was a planter. Now don't get me wrong, for a while he was a lumber and brick merchant with his brothers. He moved from that to being a steamboat agent, dealing with the purchase and selling of steamships.²² During his time as a steamboat agent he was in several disputes with different companies on a variety of problems. These problems ranged from produce going bad on a trip north due to delay in the shipping, to the wrong name being put on a deed for the steamship "Swan".²³ Mr. McAlpin's real success came in the way of a type of rice which he grew which produced 452 grains per stalk the best on the river.²⁴

Civic Affiliations

James Wallace was a prominent member of several clubs, associations, and societies. James was admitted to the St. Andrews Society in 1855. The St. Andrews Society was an association of Scottish sons, which was organized in 1790.

The society was ranked second only to the Union Society in age. Later on James became a Steward in the society between (1882-1883).²⁵ James was also a prominent member of the Georgia Hussars, which he was admitted to on May 31, 1852. He then served with them at the attack on Skidaway Island in 1861.²⁶ He was also one of the organizers of the Savannah Rifle Association/Club which was organized on September 17, 1875. He was the Vice President of the association for several years. James was also a very active member in the competitions that the association held, which were sometimes held at the Hermitage Plantation.²⁷ James was also a member of the Savannah Yacht Club.²⁸

Death

James Wallace McAlpin lived to the age of 73 years and 9 months, and was described in his obituary as one of Savannah's best known citizens. He did outlive his wife by some 15 years. He died in the house of his son, Henry, who lived in the house named the McAlpin House. His later years were spent in this house due to his loss of sight. According to the newspaper, Mr. McAlpin died from a nervous chill, but in looking at the death certificate I was able to find out the cause of death. James Wallace McAlpin died of congestion of the lungs according to Doctor C.C. Schley's death report. On August 3, 1905, Savannah lost both a well-known citizen and a prominent businessman.²⁹

Author's Note:

At this time I would like to take the opportunity to thank the staff of the Georgia Historical Society, the staff of the Chatham County Public Library, the staff of the County Court House, Records and Probate Court, the Armstrong State College Library staff, and the living relatives of James Wallace McAlpin for their assistance in my research.

While composing this paper, I came across another relative living in Hartsdale, New York who has a much broader knowledge of the McAlpin family than the relatives of Savannah. I was also informed of a book available about the McAlpin family, but was unable to obtain it to use as a reference at this time. Given more time I would contact this relative to obtain information about the family and this book. I would also do a more extensive search into the business and social life of James Wallace McAlpin.

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Pgs. 62, 98, 112, 148.
4. Information conveyed to me from Katherine T. Strong, relative.
5. Hartridge, Walter C. Hartridge Collection. Collection #1349 Box 35.
6. Savannah River Plantations. Edited by Mary Granger.
Pgs. 442-447.
7. Ibid.
8. Waring, Joseph Frederic. Cerveau's Savannah. The Georgia Historical Society, Savannah, Georgia.
P. 63.
9. Obituary. Savannah Morning News. August 4, 1905.
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10. Prince, Richard E. Central of Georgia Railway and Connecting Lines. Millard, Nebraska:
Prince, 1976.
P. 13.
11. Index to Marriages (1806-1950). Chatham County Probate Court.
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12. Obituary. Savannah Morning News. August 4, 1905.
P. 5, Col. 7.
13. Roll of Officers and Members of the Georgia Hussars.
The Morning News, Savannah, Georgia.
14. Ibid.
15. Information conveyed to me from Katherine T. Strong, relative.

16. Hartridge, Walter C. Hartridge Collection. Collection #1349 Box 35.
17. Savannah River Plantations. Edited by Mary Granger. Pgs. 442-447.
18. Obituary. Savannah Morning News. August 4, 1905. P. 5, Col. 7.
19. Index to Grantee's. Chatham County Records Library. (Refer to deed books).
20. Information conveyed to me by staff of Records Library, County Court House by use of Vicinity Map of 1910 and ward deed books.
21. Index to Grantee's. Chatham County Records Library. (Refer to deed books).
22. Savannah Morning News. February 8, 1871: 3/2.
23. Savannah Morning News. July 18, 1871: 3/3.
24. Savannah Morning News. September 25, 1868.
25. History of St. Andrews Society of the City of Savannah (1750-1950) Savannah, Georgia. Revised 1950.
26. Roll of Officers and Members of the Georgia Hussars The Morning News, Savannah, Georgia.
27. Savannah Morning News. 1870-1890. Several references over the years.
28. Ibid.
29. Obituary. Savannah Morning News. August 4, 1905. P. 5, Col. 7. Refer to death certificate at Office of Vital Records.

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P. 63.

FAMILY MEMBERS INTERVIEWED:

James Wallace McAlpin Hancock
P.O. Box #484
Bluffton, South Carolina 29910

Aaron Champion McAlpin
230 East 46th Street
Savannah, Georgia 31405

Katherine T. Strong
229 East Gordon Street
Savannah, Georgia 31401

Sarah McAlpin
303 East 44th Street
Savannah, Georgia 31405

ANNA DAVIS McALPIN
(m) 3 FEB 1884

[ANNA DAVIS McALPIN]

PHILIP SHUEY

MARIA CHAMPION^{McALPIN}
(m) 24 DEC 1886
JOSEPH CHURCHILL STRONG

AARON CHAMPION McALPIN
(m) 30 DEC 1857 - 3 SEPT 1909
MARY DAVIS FOOTMAN
13 SEPT 1861 - 11 NOV 1948

AARON CHAMPION^{McALPIN}
(m) 16 FEB 1890 - 11 SEPT 1950
MARGARET MARTIN

CLAUDIA THOMAS^{McALPIN}
(m) 6 JULY 1887

FRANCIS WHITNEY
20 DEC 1885 - AUG 1956

HENRY McALPIN
(m) 4 AUG 1860 - 28 APR 1931
CLAUDIA THOMAS
15 JAN 1860 - 6 OCT 1887

MARY ELLEN McALPIN
(m) 28 FEB 1863
LT. FREEMAN VALENTINE WALKER
20 JULY 1860

JAMES WALLACE McALPIN, JR.
(m) 24 APR 1865 - 9 AUG 1910
CATHERINE BOSTICK
11 APR 1947

MARIA (CHAMPION) SCHLEY
20 NOV 1897 - 30 DEC 1900

MARIA SOPHIA McALPIN
(m) 31 JAN 1869 - 16 DEC 1938
WILLIAM HENRY WALKER SCHLEY
4 FEB 1867 - 12 FEB 1926

MARY TOWNSEND
SCHLEY

SAVANNAH - b: 29 OCTOBER 1831
SAVANNAH - d: 3 AUGUST 1905

JAMES WALLACE McALPIN - m - MARIA SOPHIA CHAMPION
SAVANNAH - b: 28 JULY 1832
CARTERSVILLE, GA - d: 18 SEPTEMBER 1890

[best copy
available]

POINTS OF INTEREST
FOR
SAVANNAH AND VICINITY MAP

1. Thunderbolt
2. Whitemarsh
3. Wilmington Island
4. Lazaretto
5. Fort Screven
6. Savannah Beach
7. Fort Pulaski
8. Bonaventure
9. Grimbles Point
10. Isle of Hope
11. Wormsloe
12. Bethesda
13. Beaulieu
14. Vernon View
15. Montgomery
16. Chatham County Farm
17. White Bluff
18. Coffee Bluff
19. Hermitage Plantation
20. Brampton Plantation
21. Whitehall Plantation
22. Mulberry Grove Plantation
23. Richmond Oakgrove Plantation
24. Abercorn
25. Ebenezer
26. Silk Hope Plantation
27. Lebanon Plantation
28. Beverly-Berwick Plantation
29. Laurel Green Plantation
30. Little Neck Plantation
31. Wild Horn Plantation
32. Grove Hill Plantation
33. Grove Point Plantation
34. Vallambrosa Plantation

(129)

[19]

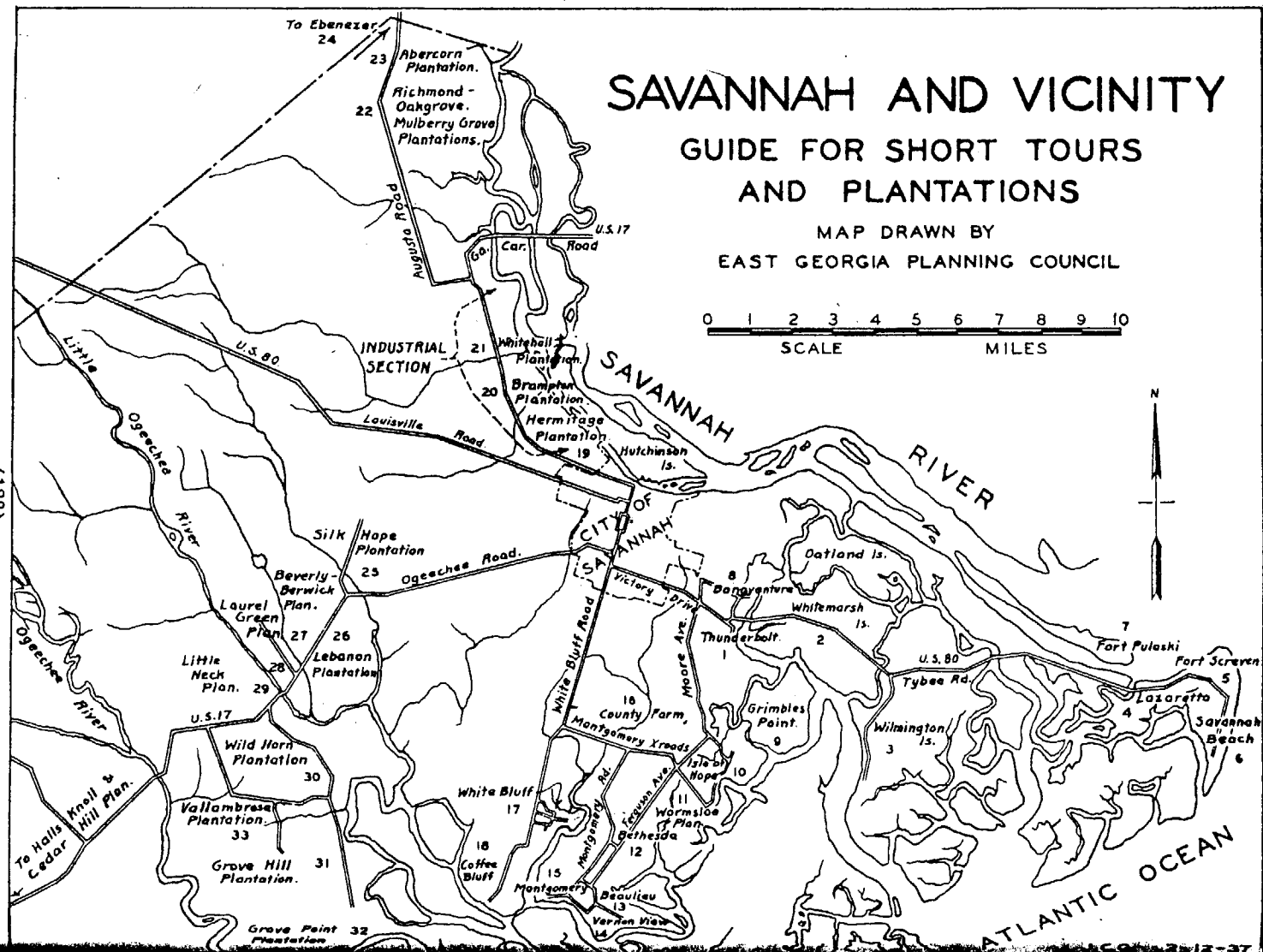


SAVANNAH AND VICINITY

GUIDE FOR SHORT TOURS AND PLANTATIONS

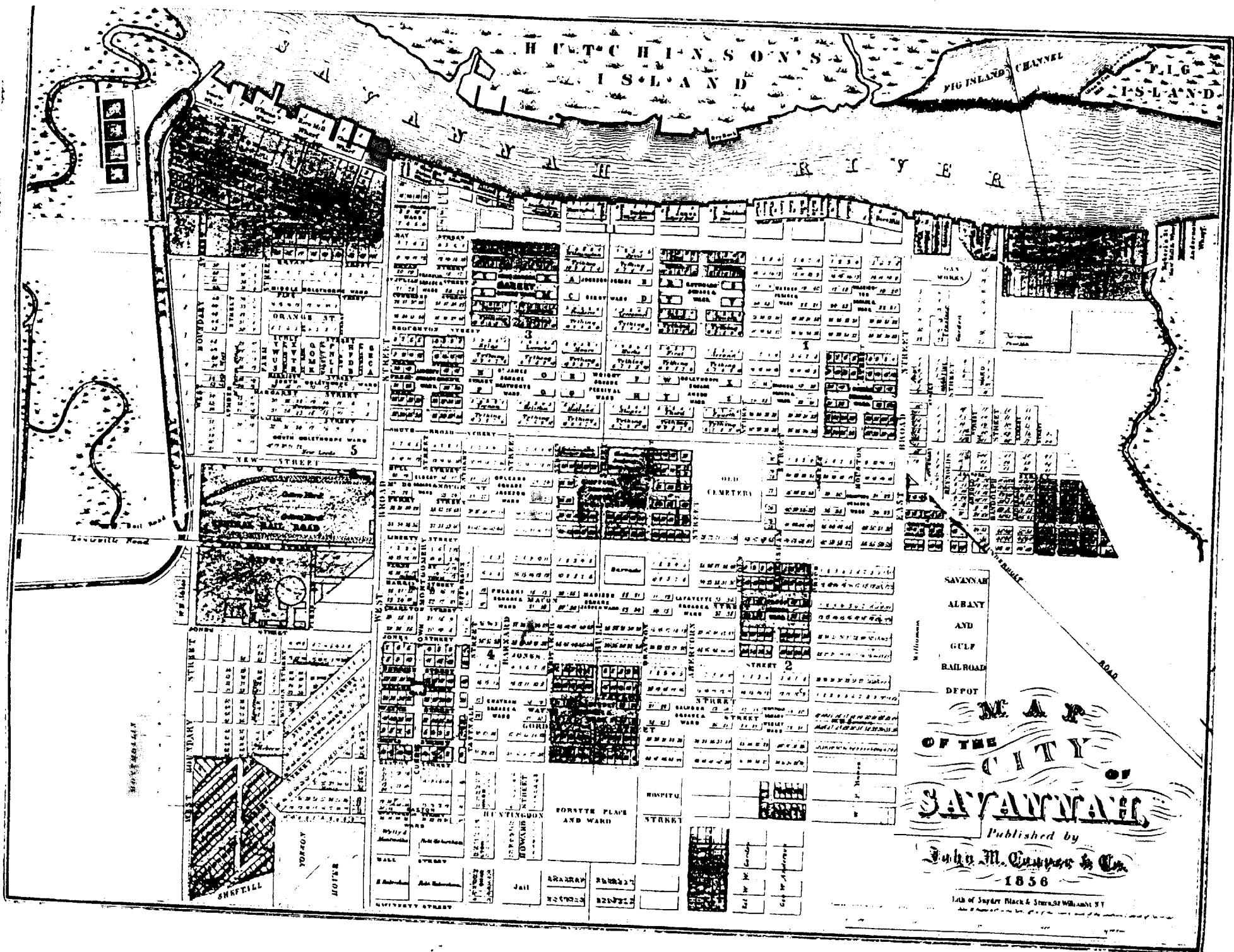
MAP DRAWN BY
EAST GEORGIA PLANNING COUNCIL

0 1 2 3 4 5 6 7 8 9 10
SCALE MILES



[267]

(128)



[21]

Physicians' Certificate of the Cause of Death.

Physicians are requested to use Classification of Causes of Death on back of this Certificate. When permanently filled, let it be taken to the office of the Health Officer. No Corpses must be taken from the city without a written permit from the Health Officer.

I Hereby Certify, That I am of the County of San Diego

Aged, 7 years, 9 months, 10 days

Sex, Male Race, White Nationality, English

single married widowed divorced

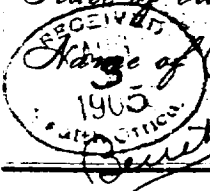
Date of death Sept 10 1905 Address 230 Broadway St

Name of disease causing death Exhaustion of the Heart

Duration of disease Seven days

Place of burial Trinity Church

Signature of Undertaker Wm J. ...



Physician's Signature, E. C. ... M. D.